

Federal Grain Inspection Service
Field Management Division
(Area Program) (Field Office)

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Agricultural Commodity Grader (Grain)
Quality Assurance Specialist, GS-1980-11

I. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) is responsible for: (1) Establishing official grain Standards, (2) promoting the uniform application of the standards by official personnel, (3) providing for a national system of grain inspection and (4) regulating weighing certifying the weight of grain shipped in interstate and foreign commerce as authorized by the U.S. Grain Standards Act (USGSA) and the regulations. FGIS further carries out the delegated responsibilities assigned under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (AMA).

The Field Management Division (FMD) plans, develops, administers, and manages all grain inspection, weighing, and related support programs and activities assigned to FGIS under the USGSA and AMA. This includes managing and coordinating the programs for mandatory inspection and weighing services at export locations and Federal oversight of agencies performing inspection and weighing services through the delegation and/or designation arrangement.

The Field Office is responsible for administering all programs and activities stated above within their geographic boundaries. The Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS) assists Management in providing technical and administrative direction and supervision of field office employees by managing and coordinating the national and local Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) programs for inspection services at export location and by oversight of agencies performing inspection services through the delegation and/or designation arrangement. QASs are flexible enough in their ability that they may be detailed to other field office circuits involving different grains and commodities. The QAS works as both an extension of and a liaison to the Board of Appeals and Review (BAR) in their ability to ensure that Field Inspectors' subjective interpretations are consistent.

II. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary duty of the incumbent is to develop, maintain, and conduct a quality assurance program for the purpose of monitoring and ensuring the accuracy of: (1) interpretive grading determinations on subjective grading factors and (2) mechanical inspection determinations. Accuracy and proficiency are determined for field office Agricultural Commodity Graders (ACG), Agency Quality Assurance Specialists (AQAS), official agency managers/owners, licensed inspectors, technicians, and the entire official inspection system. The QAS assists the Field Office Manager (FOM) in managing the implementation of the QA/QC program for all aspects of grain, pulses, and rice inspection. The QAS plans and coordinates activities within the QA/QC program with oversight from the FOM. The QAS informs the FOM on the state of general and specific grading deficiencies found to exist within the circuit and participates with the FOM in analyzing and recommending solutions to unusual grading situations affecting their circuit or affecting destination or origin circuits. The QAS develops, maintains, and revises the Local Quality Control Plan to address short-term and long-term goals through consultation with the FOM.

The QAS is identified as the technical expert for inspection processes at the field office level and makes final decisions on unusual, borderline, and unique grading situations that require further review. He/she is the standard by which all inspectors' grading accuracy is compared. The QAS assists the FOM with the Performance appraisal system for ACGs by fairly selecting and performing technical review (or oversees the review) or work performed to determine the ACG's grading accuracy. The QAS may establish the criteria and guidelines used to determine "Grading Accuracy" (a performance appraisal critical element for ACGs), through negotiations with pertinent individuals, or consultation with the FOM and may participate in the Agency's performance appraisal systems for ACTs, ACAs, or other subordinates that are assigned to work under the QAS's direction in the quality control program.

The QAS represents FGIS by conducting seminars, providing demonstrations, lecturers, and addressing questions from trade, processor, consumer, and international groups and explaining the interpretation and application of U.S. Grain Standards Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act to promote the official inspection system. The QAS plans and executes extensive travel throughout the circuit (subject to FOM approval) and contacts agency personnel, FGIS personnel and members of the trade to observe the accuracy of inspection performance and overall effectiveness. The incumbent, under the general guidance of the FOM, works to resolve grading problems and misunderstandings with trade personnel.

The QAS identifies training needs, recommends, coordinates, and provides special training and technical direction to ACGs and official agency personnel. They administer and maintain a proficiency testing and licensing for inspectors.

The QAS assembles and maintains type samples for interpretive opinions to supplement instructions and procedures contained in inspection manuals. They maintain a training library to be used in grading seminars and testing for both official and unofficial uses.

The QAS exercises discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility in the application of standards, procedures, opinions rendered, and recommend changes as necessary. The QAS serves as the FOM's primary point of contact with the BAR and official agencies concerning grading matters. The QAS communicates with the Standard and Procedures Branch regarding situations not covered under current standards or regulations and assists in updating policies by reviewing drafts and testing the effect of new policies.

To stay updated on varying crop conditions and to foresee potential grading problems, the QAS collects information from extension agents, farmers, trade groups, and other resources. The QAS uses this information as proactive measures to instruct and alert ACGs, AQASs and LIs in their circuit on crop conditions. The QAS disseminates material to individuals in their circuit, the BAR, other QASs, and all interested parties through an Early Alert program.

The QAS investigates and troubleshoots quality complaints pertaining to the inspection results obtained from the intermarket barge-tracking program, rail tracking, and through other sources. The QAS works with other QASs to correct intermarket inspection differences to assure grading consistency nationwide. The QAS generates and reviews computerized charts, graphs, and statistical material to determine if trends or technical grading problems exist and to identify the scope to which they may compromise the quality of inspection service provided by the system. He/she uses this information to assess the ability and performance of the circuit.

FACTORS

Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position

Exercise good judgment and be exceptionally skilled to make authoritative inspection interpretations and to assure uniformity within their circuit and within the official system.

Possesses a broad and exceptional knowledge of grain, pulses, rice, and processed products pertaining to official standards, official regulations, grain marketing and production in order to clarify standards and regulations for ACGs, LIs, and members of the trade. The QAS has a thorough knowledge of sampling methods, weighing, processing, storage, contract specifications, load order documents, transportation conditions, equipment checktesting and practices that directly affect product acceptability and grades. The QAS is involved in the resolution of quality concerns in the United States and abroad.

Possesses effective oral and written communication skills to provide guidance and build teamwork in and among circuits and to provide a clear understanding to official personnel regarding current or proposed procedural and interpretive changes. The QAS gives advice on difficult determinations and initiates corrective actions on misinterpretations of established grading techniques. They must also be able to explain grade interpretations, demonstrate grading techniques, and interpret field offices policies to State officials, trade representatives, and international groups.

Is capable of functioning in all FGIS locations, including the BAR.

Possesses the ability to develop seminars, tests and tools to teach and measure grade interpretations of ACGs, AQAS, and LIs. Information seminars are also provided for trade representatives.

Possesses a knowledge of statistics (i.e. frequency distributions, standards deviations, slope, bias, etc.) to formulate and interpret charts, graphs, and statistical data from a computer database using different types of computer software in order to detect potential quality related problems within the official system, to trouble-shoot probable causes, and to correct problems which may affect global grain marketing.

Understands and applies the Performance Appraisal system for pertinent field office employees and graders with "Grading Accuracy" as a critical element. The interpretive judgments of the QAS must conform to the national standards to insure uniformity and fairness among all graders nationwide. Knowledge of EEO requirements is essential.

Understands and applies GIPSA's licensing program, including initial and renewal of licenses for samplers, technicians, and inspectors. Also possesses the ability to perform and instruct others in all aspects of the program.

Factor 2 - Supervisory Controls

The incumbent works under the general direction of the FOM. Work is reviewed for overall effectiveness and compliance by observations of the end result or reports. Assignments are made with information in general terms of objectives to be achieved based priorities, and deadlines. The QAS independently plans projects, interacts with individuals within and outside of the Agency and carries out assignments to assure that the quality of the work within the circuit is maintained. Only controversial situations are referred to the FOM.

Factor 3 - Guidelines

Guidelines include FGIS regulations, procedures, handbooks, visual aids, and the policies of the FOM and Assistant FOM. The QAS is responsible for providing opinions on difficult interpretations and for developing materials to supplement or explain Agency guidelines. The QAS uses expert technical judgment to apply Agency guidelines to seasonal and regional crop variations based on past experiences and decision. The QAS seeks counsel from the BAR and/or the Standards and Procedures Branch only in extreme and unprecedented situations.

Factor 4 - Complexity

The work involves a variety of duties including: formal classroom instructing, technical oversight of work of ACGs, AQASs, and LIs in the field office circuit, participation in reviewing and testing of Agency inspection grading regulations and standards, resolving technical grading problems where data is conflicting, grading of all grains, analyzing statistical data, charts, and graphs to find problem areas, researching and determining the cause, and implementing solutions to the problem. The work involves the use of tact and diplomacy in conflict resolution with trade and inspectors to resolve customer complaints and concerns.

The QAS participates in the process of developing new and untried technology and theories by reviewing drafts, gathering and giving input from field testing. They are also involved in long-term projects to maintain and improve the quality of service.

The QAS deals with different personalities and management styles at various locations, which greatly complicates work planning and processes and may cause conflicts on opinions rendered. The QAS has to overcome resistance from industry and official personnel when implementing continuing quality changes and improved ways of assuring quality, by informing these individuals of the reasons when changes are necessary to improve grading procedures and regulations. The QAS explains the importance of official personnel's role in the inspection system and the impact on the nation's commodity marketing system. The QAS deals with various work schedules and seasonal demands to attain Agency goals.

Factor 5 - Scope and Effect

The local QAQC plan allows each field office latitude in developing processes that adequately assures quality and uniform inspections within their unique circuit. The QAS's responsibilities involve monitoring, measuring, and improving the accuracy of grading determinations made by a large and diverse groups of individuals employed by Federal, State, and private agencies within the official system throughout a large geographic area. Sample preparations, processing, and mechanical determinations are monitoring also to assure that accurate and representative samples are delivered for inspection. Statistical tools are used to identify deficiencies in grading accuracy and proficiency of ACGs, AQASs, and LIs, and technical involved in the inspection processes. The QAS continuously provides advice and technical direction for on-line inspectors' day-to-day use on unusual grading problems or situations including appeals to fulfill short-and long-term quality control needs. The incumbent's determinations are made in consultation with the FOM and are considered authoritative at the field office level.

The national AQ/QC program insures integrity throughout the official system, and insures expansion of the United States market share of international trade. Computer software and statistical tools are used in determining if the overall mission (providing uniform and accurate inspection results to its customers) is

being accomplished. The work of the QAS facilitates the marketing of grain and impacts the financial interests of producers, buyers, sellers, shippers, warehousemen, and others having financial interest in the product from origin to destination in the United States or abroad. Grading and inspection decisions have a broad impact on the quality of service provided by FGIS. The QAS provides the AQAS the corrected analytical separations; explanatory notes illustrating QAS interpretations, opinions for the AQAS's information, and guidance in maintaining uniformity in the application of interpretations and standards within the nationwide markets.

Factor 6 - Personal Contacts

Contacts are with FGIS headquarters (i.e., Field Management Division, Technical Services Division, etc.), field employees, official agency owners, AQASs, LIs, State officials, and representatives of the trade, international groups and university officials. Contacts are not established on any routine basis. They are established when quality concerns arise, crop conditions change, and when information or training is needed.

Factor 7 - Purpose of Contacts

Contacts with official field personnel are for the purpose of insuring national uniformity in the application of FGIS instructions and standards and to provide training and direction. Contact with field and headquarters provides information and guidance on all aspects of the quality control program. Industry contacts are made for the purpose of anticipating, investigating and explaining grading problems, obtaining feedback on the quality of the official system, resolving problems and conflicts to assure compliance, and promoting FGIS programs. University contacts are made for the purpose of presenting training seminars at their request and obtaining information regarding new grain varieties as they are developed.

Factor 8 - Physical Demands

The work is partially sedentary. Phases of the work require considerable physical exertion.

Factor 9 - Work Environment

The work involves occasional work in grain elevators subject to potentially explosive concentrations of grain dust in rice mills, processed product plants, rail yards, dock loading and unloading facilities, and various warehouses. It may also involve work at extreme heights in grain elevators and aboard ships. Some work is performed outdoors under varying weather conditions.